

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Finding Meaning in the Christian Life (Lesson 1)
Scripture: 1st John 1:6; Romans 1:17
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: May 6th 2001

The Meaning of Walking By Faith

Introduction We are right in the middle of an exposition of the Book of Ephesians and I am going to take a break from this series for a few weeks and do a mini-series on something that I have been thinking about. Then Lord willing, we will return to Ephesians four together. I am entitling this new mini-series "Finding Meaning in the Christian Life" and I don't know if it's a mid-life prompting because I am asking these questions myself but I hope it is more than that.

- I sense that, whether they can actually articulate the question or not, Christian young people are in a crisis and searching to see if the "faith" has much real meaning for them.
- I also have rubbed shoulders with seniors who, while there is no doubt they can articulate the question, do so plainly sometimes—"what is the meaning in my faith? Where do I find satisfaction and fulfillment and peace of mind as a Christian? Where is the meaning as my years wind down and I must concentrate more and more on just staying alive?"
- And of course thinking people in their mid-years, particularly men, are struggling to find meaning in going to church, making friends from their Christian circles and trying to get satisfaction in those relationships, discarding alcohol, drugs, porn, smoking, clubbing and so forth. What do I replace all that stuff with? they are asking...
- Christian single people are told to not date non-Christians; sometimes they actually believe that—and so they wait. But Mr. Wonderful hasn't ridden up on his white horse; Miss Wonderful hasn't just showed up running across the field in her flowing white dress... Yet...
- A married 30something asks, "Why stay married to this person whom I don't like much any more, or who has made marriage so hard?"

"Where is the meaning in this faith which I read someplace in my Bible is a rich inheritance, a powerful citizenship?" (I invite you in our testimony time tonight to come and share something about where you find meaning in your walk with the Lord...)

I suspect I am going to have to sell you on this series pretty quick. I fear I might have your attention only briefly. If I can't convince you fast that there is GREAT meaning for a person to walk by faith with God, I know I'll lose your attention. But I feel this is an urgent thing... And we are going to consider things (after Mothers' Day next week) like,

See the pump-primer brochure this morning, *Finding Meaning in Your Walk*,

~~Week 2 - Planting Seeds of Meaning—what are the seeds which if we nurture them in the soil of day to day living, will grow into a good crop of feeling meaning in your faith?~~

~~Week 3 - Identifying & Neutralizing Meaning “Blockers” — There are some things which will poison the roots of feeling meaning and significance in my walk. What are those and can they be neutralized?~~

~~Week 4 - How a Servant heart Gives Meaning — Developing a perspective of “How Can I Minister to You?”, rather than “How Can You Minister to Me?” somehow seems to give the benefit of feeling like you’re making an impact and providing some sense of real meaning.~~

~~Week 5 - Spiritual Gifts: Tools for Meaning – We’ll return briefly to this subject, considering it from the standpoint of what I get out of using the gift God has given me...~~

~~Week 6 - How Entertainment Affects Meaning – I am convinced that we need to think about how entertainment contributes to my sense of meaning in the Christian life. Being one who likes being entertained in some ways, I am not going to “bash” entertainment. But does it either boost or diminish my sense of deep meaning in my walk with Christ, or is it neutral—doing nothing one way or the other to my faith?~~

~~Week 7 - The Meaning of Significant Spiritual Victories — And finally it is on my mind to consider the powerful effect of spiritual victories on my feeling of meaning in my own walk with God. If I have none, that will do something to my excitement and commitment to Christ. But if I have a few, and I am aware of it, that will definitely temper my feeling of The Point in the Christian life.~~

So what IS the point of the Christian life? Old Testament saints might have wondered sometimes, “what’s the point in serving Jehovah—Messiah hasn’t come yet, there hasn’t been a prophetic voice for a long time, the enemies of Israel seem to have more victories over us than defeats and all it seems to be is offering sacrifices over and over again... And the early Christians, especially those who watched Jerusalem burn in 70 A.D. might have wondered about it..

I start this off with two Bible verses, one from the apostle John and one from the apostle Paul, who was quoting from the Old Testament prophet Habbakuk...

1 John 1:7 NASB ***but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.***

Romans 1:17 NASB ***For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”*** NIV For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” THE MESSAGE: God’s way of putting people right shows up in the acts of faith, confirming what Scripture has said all along: “The person in right standing before God by trusting him really lives.” (Habakkuk 2:4 “Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith.) (also quoted in Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38.)

The meaning of the Christian life is that it is not a religious routine, a set of activities. Fundamentally it is a **walk**, a lifestyle and a stroll alongside of an invisible sin-bearer. I think that is a pretty strange thing to try to communicate to a non-Christian, if that is what the Christian life really is... Folks around us might be able to understand a change of agenda, or trading in one set of behaviors for another, going to church now on Sundays when before I did not. Those are tangible and visible things. But “walking with an invisible Jesus?” Hearing His voice, seeing His plan for me, being meaningfully used by Him to spread something He called “His kingdom?” How do I get that across to non-Christians

whom I know? And more importantly, how do I find meaning in something which is primarily still invisible?

The apostle John wrote ***this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*** (1st John 1:5-7)

If a person walks in darkness, as the apostle put it, and says he is in fellowship with Christ he is lying. A general lifestyle of ungodly things dictates where that person really is, spiritually regardless of what he says. We may not WANT him or her to be there but they are, if their lifestyle invites the darkness, has the vocabulary of darkness and entertains the passions and desires of darkness they have no right to say, "But oh, I am ALSO in fellowship with Jesus Christ."

But if we walk in the light ***as He Himself is in the light*** two things happen: (1) we have fellowship with one another—in the sense that John meant it, I think that's a meaningful thing. We are bound together, mystically and spiritually by our common place in the light with Jesus. He is always in the light because He IS the light. In heaven there is no darkness and there are no shades of gray! When we're walking routinely with Him we're right beside Him in His light. I don't think we have to chain ourselves to some rigid chain-gang regimen of exercises or to a church in order to *stay* in the light. I think that kind of thinking deteriorates our sense of meaning in the Christian life anyway... We exist in a normal state of being blessed by Him unless we wander *out* of the light. Now can we find any real meaning in this promise from John? I think there's lots of meaning in it because I choose to believe what the Scripture just said to me.

And then John said (2) we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus. That is no small thing! If we caught a glimpse ever of how sinful we were apart from Christ we would be terrified. If we ever really saw how Unclean we were, how deserving of judgment we would be overwhelmed with relief to be told that as long as we walk in the light ***the blood of Jesus...cleanses us from all sin.*** That is the biggest and first piece of meaning in our walk with Christ. It is under the blood, in fellowship with other Christians. That is what defines us. We are not defined by our denomination of affiliation. We are not designed by our American language or our customs or our music. We do not achieve status by our good works. We are identified and marked out as important, special, precious by the fact that we walk in the light.

Romans 1:17 also uses the idea of walking. There Paul says our walk is ***by faith.*** Paul took from Habbakuk in the Old Testament when he wrote that. Our whole Christian life is a life of faith. I wish sometimes it were more by sight. I wish I didn't have to trust in an invisible God day in and day out. I wish I could see Him maybe for just five minutes. I wish I could expect that at certain times of the year or seasons that I would automatically feel all spiritual and holy. But it eludes me. I can't just GO to Congress or to any other

event and expect God-sightings. I have to walk each day as best I can in His light. Then, He's there (*as He Himself is in the light*).

I guess I'm saying to you that finding meaning begins by accepting and working with the fact that it is a day to day walk by faith, not just some dramatic experiences which gives my Christian life real meaning. I find more meaning in the process of walking with Him, each day, each month, each year, than by looking for the "holy grail." The Christian life means that I AM WALKING IN THE LIGHT BY FAITH. That's the basis of everything I do, the good things anyway. I find meaning in ministry, in Bible reading, in witnessing, in praying for people in running meetings, in representing this church elsewhere ALL BECAUSE I am walking in the light by faith. I didn't USE TO do that, but now I do! I do not seek one all-consuming experience. I seek many faith experiences. I seek the tempering of my tastes and desires by the indwelling Spirit who would woo me to Christ over time, who would court my will and my decision-making so that I just feel purpose-driven BECAUSE I know He loves me all day every day and all year.

Probably the most hurtful thing a pastor can ever hear—maybe worse than "I'm not going to be attending here any more"; maybe worse than "I'm struggling with this sin of that sin"—is, "I don't see the point any longer..." I don't want you to ever feel that way. You've got to believe that the Lord is working in your life and you need to stay in the light. But He has such great work for us to do. He tells us over and over again that He loves us. He has given us the Spirit, spiritual gifts, a wonderful Bible, new friends or at least the potential for new friends and the promise that He, at least, will never leave nor forsake us. Let's think about how we find meaning in our walk with Him. Come tonight and share or just listen to others share about how they find meaning in walking with the Lord Jesus...

Finding Meaning in Your Walk

- **What does it mean to walk by faith?**
- **Planting seeds of meaning**
- **Identifying & neutralizing meaning "blockers"**
- **How a servant-heart gives meaning**
- **Spiritual gifts: tools for meaning**
- **How entertainment affects meaning**
- **The meaning-value of significant spiritual victories**

1 John 1:7 NASB **but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.**

Romans 1:17 NASB **For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."**

NIV **For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."**

THE MESSAGE: **God's way of putting people right shows up in the acts of faith, confirming what Scripture has said all along: "The person in right standing before God by trusting him really lives."**

(Habakkuk 2:4 ***"Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith."***)

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Finding Meaning in the Christian Life (Lesson 2)
Scripture: Romans 8; Phil. 4:7,8
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: May 20th 2001



Seeds of Meaning

Introduction Many people today are looking for things which give true meaning to life. They pursue religion, making money, gaining power, doing good in the community, fun and pleasure, privacy, sexuality, the arts, family reunions, physical fitness, sports, history, politics, and for millions their greatest feeling of meaning is just successfully surviving—getting to the end of the day with enough to eat or a roof over their heads...

I like to go to Home Depot. When you walk into Home Depot, there are many products and many departments in front of us. You might go first to the kitchen center and then to carpentry and then to the tool aisle and then finish up by walking through the garden center. There is a wonderfully full array of products available. I think that for many people in this culture finding meaning has become like shopping in a Home Depot or a "Wal-Mart of Meaning." We "shop for "meaning and purposefulness in our employment, in our home, in our church-going. We don't want to be short-changed or to lose out on some opportunity that might increase my overall satisfaction with life just a little bit more... Something in our joint cultural experience tells us, "Life owes me." And so we pursue and we get and we achieve and we get some more and we experience and we feel a little better about ourselves each year... "Hey! My life MEANS something."

On July 2nd, 1863 the life of an unknown college philosophy professor from Maine was changed forever when he found himself in command of the extreme Union left flank at Gettysburg on a hill called Little Round Top. Before that day no one ever heard of Professor, now Colonel Joshua Chamberlain. After that day his name spread like wildfire and he spent the next fifty years re-telling the story over and over again about how he led the 20th Maine down the hill with bayonets fixed, out of ammunition and into the line of the Alabama troops. It turned the tide of battle for the day, preserved the Union line for the next day's battle which was so close to a draw that the Confederates withdrew and abandoned their invasion of the north. Almost all historians call the battle of Gettysburg (and arguably Day Two, Little Round Top) the turning point of the Civil War and although it took another two full years of fighting, the Union was preserved and history was changed. Joshua Chamberlain found meaning (and strove to preserve the feeling for himself), in one two hour period of his life.



People find meaning career choice, family relationships and once in a while in one-time experiences. But for a Christian, are we governed by something more than random experiences or studied choices? Is there *more* that brings meaning for a true Christian?

I am looking and listening on this question these days and I suggest that there is a great deal more for a Christian to find meaning in.

One way of looking at the Christian's search for meaning for his life is to see the Christian walk as a *balance* between the routine and the spontaneous. We find meaning in a certain pleasurable routine of devotion, quiet time, worship, serving people, using our spiritual gifts in dependable and predictable ways. And we find meaning in the unexpected, spontaneous wildlife of walking with the invisible Jesus—He puts out-of-the-blue opportunities in our path; gives unlooked for blessings; allows unfortunate incidents and then uses them for good and teaching and even a blessing for others.

I think Jesus was talking about meaning in the Beatitudes. In Matthew 5,6 and 7 He talked about things which concerned the Kingdom, kingdom principles. At the base all of the things He said were built on the idea that in pursuing the kingdom we find great meaning!

One of the places where Paul reached to talk about Christians finding meaning in their faith-walk and therefore really seeing His hand at work in their lives—if you really hunger for that—is what Paul touches on in Romans 8. In part of that great chapter we read,

*...us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For those who are according to the flesh **set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.** (8:4b,5)*

And he wrote to the Colossian Christians (3:1-3)

*If then you have been raised up with Christ, **keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.***

And he wrote to the Philippian Christians (4:8,9)

*~~Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, **let your mind dwell on these things.**~~
~~The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you.~~*

~~Against the backdrop of (3:18-21)~~

*~~For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, **who set their minds on earthly things.**~~
~~For our **citizenship** is in heaven, from which also we **eagerly wait** for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.~~*

If nothing else you can see that the New Testament talks a lot about how people set their minds—how they focus and pursue meaning. The Bible gives a great deal of thought

and wisdom to what seeds we can plant in our lives that will sprout a sense of meaning and purpose and significance. Now let's spend a few minutes in the text... Consider again what Paul said to those Philippians, about what they should **let their minds dwell on:**

Whatever is...

NASB: True, honorable, right, pure, lovely, good repute, excellence, praise

KJV: True, honest, just, pure, lovely, good report, virtue, praise

NIV: True, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy

Now I like the word "whatever." It's an open-ended, you-get-to-decide word. Paul does not narrow down the Christian walk to a few select, apostolically approved activities. He says, if it's a true thing, go for it. If it's an honorable or an honest thing, that's great—go for it. If it is a right thing, with justice surrounding it, it's OK. If it has purity and loveliness and it is spoken well of and has an excellence about it, think on that, pursue that. It's great and worthy of looking for meaning in it.

~~In my book that I have been reading about Greek archeological sites I noticed that it seems like in every major ancient Greek community they had a theatre. Today the remains of the theatres are everywhere over there. The ancient Greeks loved plays and acting and drama. We love theatrical entertainment too. If it embodies purity and excellence, it is a good thing. Music is a wonderful avenue to express meaning to yourself, to God and to others. If it is a noble-minded kind of music with a rightness to it and it speaks truthfully, go for it!~~

John MacArthur notes that if a thing is true it is found in God (Study Bible). That's a profound statement. In other words there is nothing that is true which is outside of God. That means that God is relevant to everything that is true. And for that matter everything that is good, healthy, profitable and ultimately happy.

There is a rightness and a wrongness in the world. There are some things which are morally pure and many things—it seems more and more—which are immoral. We are to dwell on the pure and on the things which are **right, just** which are in harmony with God's standard of holiness (MacArthur's Study Bible). "Oh no," I can hear some people say... "If it involves holiness then there goes the fun of it..." Let me tell you something: I have had more fun in one year of being a Christian than I had in nineteen of being a non-Christian. If it is pure and holy and just, God will bless it and you will find meaning in it.

~~I suspect that although it involves hard work, one reason the people keep going down town to do the Salvation Army feeding ministry is because they find meaning in it and even some fun. It is just and right and pure to do that and in doing that there is a sense of satisfaction. And meaning.~~

The promise here as it is in the promise just preceding involves the peace of God indwelling your thinking... The peace of God is no casual, small thing. It is a significant thing to really have it!

~~I talked with a pastor this week who has served his congregation for the past eleven years and this week was transferred by their denomination to another city, effective July 4th. When I asked him how he felt about it he said we really have the peace of God that He is in it. I believe him!~~

So here's what this piece of this series on finding meaning in your Christianity is about: There are some little seeds that you can plant in your life which will grow into big plants of meaning for you. They will produce in your life a sense of purpose and significance. I can't dictate to you what all the activities might be—hopefully some will involve YOU being involved with our church. But God leads believers to serve Him ~~outside of the church~~ sometimes too.

The “meaning seeds” are the whatever-things. I mean, if you find you like hanging out with other people, do that! Find a little Christian circle wherein you can fit and find acceptance. Go to it faithfully and begin to serve in that group. It might be a Bible study or a youth group or a supper-club or a prayer meeting, whatever. God will bless your planting the seed, I think, and you will begin to feel some meaning to your faith.

Do you like something which is generally of *good report*? Most folks around regard it highly and think well of it. Enter that thing as a Christian and you will find some sense of meaning in your walk as you involve yourself as a Christian. For me it was, for nine years, being involved with Christian schools and also with the New Bedford High School Band. For you it might be something else. But as we go out and explore areas of activity, as Christians IN those areas we can really sense that the Lord is using us there. We get a sense of meaning there.

Back in the Colossians passage he said to keep seeking the things above. That is as opposed to the things below! The earthly things of this world. If you keep seeking kingdom things, as the Scripture commands you, you will get as a fringe benefit a sense of purpose for your life. How many times have we heard about wealthy people who have put so much energy into amassing a fortune only to find themselves feeling so empty?

In general terms, here are some more “meaning seeds”

Helping, Defending, Teaching, Mercy-giving, Joy-crafting, Blessing & edifying, Devotion and Meditation, Building

There are things we do which are essentially meaningless. Sometimes even as Christians we get trapped into a routine of doing things which really don't make a lot of difference. Our current culture is great at tempting us to spend time, money and energy on a great many things which are really, in the great scheme of life, meaningless.

If you want meaning in your life, sow some seeds of meaning. Give your energy and resources to what God says is truly meaningful. Identify projects, long-term and short term which promote godly meaning.

Next Week: “I.D.ing” and Neutralizing Meaning “Blockers”

politics

making money sports

Privacy

religion

gaining power

the arts

physical fitness

Doing good in the community

Fun
Pleasure

family reunions

sexuality

survival...

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Finding Meaning in Your Christian Walk (Lesson 3)

Scripture: Hebrews 12:15 etc.

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: May 27th 2001

ID'ing & Neutralizing Meaning "Blockers"

Introduction There are so many schools of thought out there about how to find meaning in your faith. Some say a routine of spiritual-related discipline—regular quiet time, church attendance, small group participation—brings meaning. Some say plugging into highly “spiritual” events where there’s lots of healing and prophecy going on is where to really find purpose and direction for your own faith. Some say that outreach is the place where you really find meaning—going OUT and meeting unchurched people and first presenting the Gospel and then serving them in some way in order to win the second chance to talk some more with them... But some say any deliberate activity *at all* kills grace and we just need to sit and be quiet and let the Lord pour meaning into our faith... This is why we’re doing this little series.

To get some ideas flowing about meaning.

To hear one another on this (we’ve had two testimony times so far...).

To think through where we find meaning and what might get in the way.

Today it’s the What-Might-Get-In-The-Way message and I could probably do a whole sub-series just on this aspect. But we will press on...

I’m still enough of a regular meat-and-potatoes kind of Christian and practically minded that I want to focus and identify and even obsess about the specific and concrete things which *block* my own sense of purpose and drive and direction in my Christian life. I’m a “list” guy and I’m always categorizing and arranging things in my head. I would normally TEND to prepare a message like this and talk about the usual things that Christians might find inhibit and block their experience of meaning and crisp purposefulness in their faith. I normally would present a list, and then proceed to attack each item on the list: like doubt, confusion, weariness, lust, hurts and pain, anger and so forth...

But instead today I’m going to go a little more directly “biblical.” I think that inherently within the writings of the New Testament there’s a strong sense of drive and meaning. I think the apostles spent a good bit of time getting new groups of people on the right track and then working hard to KEEP them on the right track, even as they were writing letters and histories which the Spirit was inspiring and before to long (just as they apostles were dying off) He would collect into the New Testament... But we read about the hard work of the apostles instructing, modeling, demonstrating, re-defining and upgrading their calling from God and trying to pass it on, intact, to the next generation.

The whole Book of Hebrews is about this. There were some new Christians, Jewish originally, who were thinking about going back to the purely Jewish way of life and abandoning their new adherence to Jesus Christ. I want to look at a piece of the letter to these Hebrew Christians and look for how that writer identified (“i.d.’ed”) meaning “blockers” and how he said they were to neutralize them. This isn’t quite the simple list approach, taken straight from my experience but I think you will see some things here that are valuable...

Now the first three verses of Hebrews 12 really summarize the walk of faith nicely: *Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us* [all those heroes of the faith in Hebrews 11], *let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*
2 *fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*
3 *For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

All our faith is about ultimately, is Jesus. The song this morning *Give Me Jesus* really calls it right: “In the morning when I rise; and when I am alone; and when I come to die, give me Jesus...” Our faith is about getting to know Him better and better. It’s not just about getting to know Him initially, but continuing to get to know Him. My greatest sense of meaning in my Christianity is in and through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When I’m walking closely with HIM, I feel great purpose and drive and calling in my walk of faith. So we try to *fix our eyes on Jesus*.

And if we jump down to verse 14 we read *Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord*. I find meaning in peace. Here *peace* isn’t that spiritual peace with God but we are told to be peace-makers among men, specifically to try to be in a state of peace with everyone around us. Christians should not be combative, cantankerous people always looking for a fight. It encourages a sense of meaning to be at peace. Military warriors are among the most pacifistic people there are because as warriors they know something of the horrors and tragedy and sadness of conflict. And that is the first meaning “blocker” today. CONFLICT blocks and impedes feeling like your faith is alive and matters. Now if conflict gets handed to you just because you’re a Christian that is one thing (Jesus predicted that His followers would experience some conflict just because of their stand for Him). But if we MAKE conflict or contribute to it, our personal excitement and joy in the faith generally evaporate.

Immediately attached is another focus for us—*sanctification* which means the gradual acquisition of personal holiness. It is the getting of more and more, a little at a time, of change, of becoming like Jesus. I think Jesus was the coolest person that ever was. I really believe that. I think He always said the right thing at the right time, or He knew when to be quiet. I think He maintained a coolness and level-headedness that people could see. But He was also the holiest man that could ever be because He was morally perfect. Jesus could see God, so to speak, because

He possessed a perfection that no one else had. He was willing to INFUSE that nature of holiness into anyone willing to engage in the process. And His holiness, gradually nurtured inside of me, is what sanctification is. Now sanctification is progressive. It gradually takes root in my life and progressively grows in my mind and will and heart. The meaning “blocker” to watch out for is STAGNATION. When your walk stagnates, one of the first things to go is your readiness and willingness to answer the question, “what’s the point?” If you let your faith lapse into or just BE a series of goings to church, participating in an annual cycle of seasonal ceremonies you will eventually feel the loss of real drive and purpose. I think this is why we see people leave churches. It isn’t just disappointment or misunderstanding or getting to busy. When a person’s own WALK stagnates The Point disappears. The writer to Hebrews therefore says to **pursue...sanctification.**

Verses 15 & 16a are interesting... The “meaning strategy” is to **See to it** which is our responsibility to do something. I need to, you need to, every church member needs to make it our focus and keep attentive to whether each of us is **falling short of the grace of God.** That’s an interesting phrase. If I am saved by grace—which is to receive salvation as a free gift—how could I possibly **fall short of that grace?** Well, remember this is a letter to a whole community of people who PROFESSED faith in Christ. Everyone in every church wasn’t and IS’NT necessarily a true and genuine Christian. A normal and healthy church is always working with an eclectic group of people and hopefully and ever-increasing crowd. You don’t know if everyone is necessarily born-again. Some are capable of HEARING about the grace of God but never really having a work of grace truly take place in their hearts. It should be our task to always encourage each other to find, develop and maintain a close walk with Christ personally.

The writer illustrates what might happen—a **root of bitterness springs up**—which probably refers to someone who begins to corrupt others from within the church. It might be someone who gets bitter and critical and starts back-biting others privately. It might be someone who is just negative all the time and begins to diminish other people’s joy in the Lord. The writer to the Hebrews says to DISALLOW that from happening in our church. I call the meaning “blocker” CORRUPTION. It is a person or a small group of people who corrupt the church away from its central mission. They drain the church of joy and excitement in seeking Christ. They should be identified and confronted, the New Testament says. **Lest many be defiled...**

IMMORALITY is another meaning “blocker” and not in some vague, nebulous sense. The writer i.d.’s it as specific people! **Let no immoral person...** Immorality often breeds low moral! It is hard to identify immorality in a Christian church or community because it involves confronting specific people—people that are loved and valued by somebody in the church probably. But immorality which creeps in to the church will itself demoralize people and breed doubt and lust and jealousy and all kinds of trouble.

The last meaning “blocker” I want to mention today is what I’m calling MISCONCEPTION. In verse 18 the writer says **We have not come to a mountain that**

may be touched. Interesting... If you thought you have signed on to a religion that has touchable stuff, you are mistaken. It is a misconception to believe or to have your thinking twisted to think that your faith's meaning is found in seeing cool stuff and touching cool stuff. Sometimes SEEING isn't all it's cracked up to be, as the writer gives the illustration of Moses SEEING and asking NOT to see any more!

If we think that seeing visible evidences that God is here; that immediately answered prayers downloaded from God on a fast connection is what's going to bring your faith meaning you are in for a disappointment and meaning will be severely blocked from your experience.

In verse 22 we are told **You have come** to an invisible mountain, Mt. Zion, where the king lives. Eight features are mentioned in the verses which follow. (That would make in itself a neat little sermon series, "The Eight Mountain Peaks of Hebrews 12:22-24.") The main thing is this: If you have found Christ and you are seeking Him, you are seeking Him invisibly. You are hammering out a walk by faith not by sight. Things will try to block your joy and your sense of purpose and your determination to keep on. Some days those things may win out! Some days you might be tempted to ask, "What's the point?"

The Scripture anticipates all the feelings we might have and reminds us, as we should tell seekers and new converts right up front—Mt. Zion is full of power and joy and change and purpose. But it cannot be touched yet. It is not immediately gratifying necessarily.

Here's what strategies there are for neutralizing these things which might really block a sense of meaning in a church are the verbs from the passage!

Pursue

See-To-Its (three of them)

Not come/Have come

Dartmouth Bible Notes



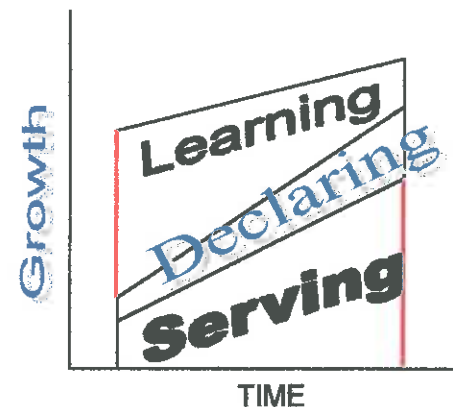
Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Finding Meaning in Your Christian Walk (Lesson 4)
Scripture: Philippians 2
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: June 3rd 2001

How A Servant-heart Gives Meaning

Introduction We are spending some time this Spring considering how we find meaning in our faith. I was remembering that when I became a Christian by my own choice (at nineteen years old as an engineering student at Virginia Tech) I was excited because I found that I couldn't learn enough! When for the first time I really started seeking the Lord a whole new world of truth opened up to me and the Bible became like a book I had never before opened. **Learning** is a big part of what a new Christian finds meaning in from the moment he first finds Christ as his personal savior.

I remembered learning things about God I never imagined before. I remember reading a popular book at the time called *The Late Great Planet Earth*, discovering for the first time that the Bible talked in some detail about the future—about *our* future. I learned words like “theology,” and “eschatology” and “doctrine” and loved getting acquainted with all the jargon of talking Christian things. I found a church that seemed so real in what they were doing and I quickly developed a taste for the things they were doing; I mean meaning and excitement—I couldn't get enough! In the beginning **MEANING** for me was largely in learning and

discovery, so much so that four years into it I started to think that maybe I wanted to “learn and discover” full time. I was trained in my earliest Christian days not by a church actually but by a Christian campus group called the Navigators. The “Navs” were real big on getting you out there sharing your faith right away. I was excited to tell people about what I had discovered in my new-found faith in Christ and what I was learning. I remember witnessing for the first time and telling a guy named Keith about Jesus and the Gospel; I was scared by excited. I found additional meaning in my new Christian life in **declaring** and I still do! And it wasn't long into my faith that I discovered that I wanted to **DO** something with this faith too. It dawned on me early that it wasn't going to be enough to just sit and “polish the silver” of all this new knowledge. I needed to go out and do something! The other aspect of growth and meaning is in **servicing** and this is what we are really focusing on today. **Point:** Early in our Christian walk we draw a lot of meaning from learning. Later when we have learned, the normal Christian life brings increasing meaning in serving. All along we find meaning in declaring, perhaps increasingly as times moves on. Slowly we get over fear, we're not intimidated by the world's bellowing that Christ is



only one possible way. We know deep down that He is *the way, the truth and the life* and we increasingly want to somehow share Him with others. That's "declaring."

Now, I love the Letter of Paul to the Philippians. One hundred and four verses that are fabulous! In verse 4 of chapter 2 he told them *do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others*. Do you want to find great meaning in your Christian life? You will find more and more in serving other people, as your faith matures. And it isn't just in doing, it is in developing a servant-heart. It starts with our chosen attitude. Look at how Paul builds this idea...

2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. 12 So then, my beloved...

And Paul talks about the young man Timothy as an example of a man with a servant heart...

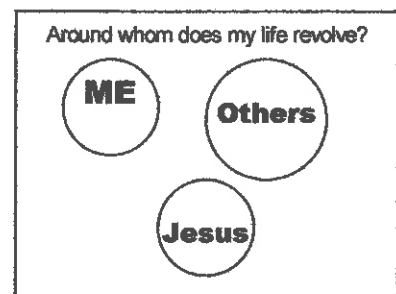
19 But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. 20 For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. 21 For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. 22 But you know of his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father.

Many people today serve their own interests first: that's their code, their perspective, their philosophy.

Others, slightly more noble-minded perhaps, seek to help other people first. That sounds good at first and it is the herald-cry of liberalism probably.

But the authentic Christian attitude is to view myself as a servant of Jesus Christ, committed first to His interests. First and foremost, I serve Him because He redeemed me! Jesus

said (John 12:26) ***If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.***



So, what are the interests of Christ Jesus?

- 1) First of all is the offer of the good news of salvation. Jesus is interested first in people hearing what He offers as a free gift, about how they can be totally forgiven by God for all their sins, past, present and future. Jesus wants people to know that by simply believing in what he did and entrusting themselves to it, any person can have salvation as a free gift. Infact, it is the only way He offers it.
- 2) Then Timothy would have been concerned, as Jesus would have been, for a great variety of other needs that the Philippian Christians might have had: to be instructed, to be encouraged and trained, to be comforted and coached. To be provided for in simple life needs. To be given good leaders that they could follow. Timothy was a rare commodity, Paul says, and I'm sure he was loathe to lose him. But he was *willing* to share Timothy with the Philippian church

for a time because Timothy was a true servant. He wanted to help. He looked for ways to help, always pouring out servanthood to people because he was a servant of the Lord Jesus first of all.

Do you think Paul or Timothy ever struggled with seeing the meaning of their faith? Did they ever wonder, what's the sense of this faith? I'm losing out on the pleasures that this world has to offer. I'm risking myself and security, for what? Now, I am not saying that Paul or Timothy or any of the other first-century Christians were perfect, larger than life people. They were susceptible of all the snares and temptations of this world (despite the way religious art depicts them!) But because they were so committed to serving and working with other people, they never lacked for a strong sense of purpose and meaning and significance in their faith. (Of course, they were both constantly defending their claims that Jesus IS the real Messiah. They were often in danger—I think it must be easier to feel meaning when your enemies surely find meaning in what you're saying—and they hate it!)

If you scan the last chapter of the Book of Romans, you see some 34 names of people who were all servant-minded in one way or another. A person who is motivated to serve and looks for ways to serve is a person who feels great meaning in his or her faith. I think that God calls us to serve in any of a number of ways, primarily through using the spiritual gift He has equipped us with (we will talk about that next Sunday, Lordwilling). But sometimes we serve NOT specifically using a gift.

Wayne may or may not have the gift of helps, but he served us this week by mowing our lawn.

Rachel may or may not have the gift of teaching but she will be serving a group of people in Scotland the first three weeks of July as she goes on her trip.

Laura and Paul may or may not have the gift of hospitality but they certainly served by hosting our Junior High Awana kids in her home every Wednesday night this past year.

Developing a servant-heart is a project of several years usually.

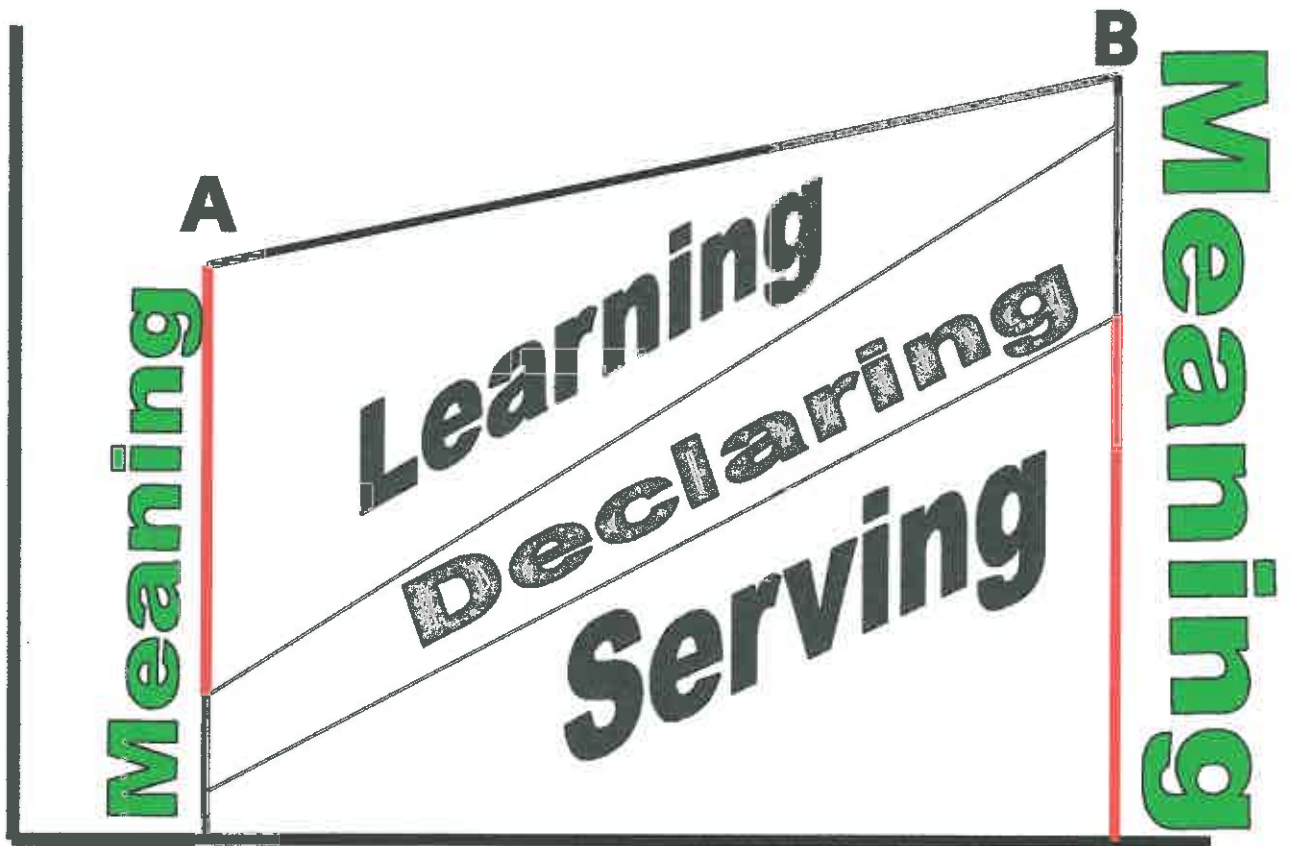
You start by **1** deciding that it IS a valuable pursuit, that God honors it and that it pleases Him—the basic desire flows out of your worship of Him. **2** Then you watch others who love to serve and maybe hang with them some to feel some of their heart-beat. I think it has done the people in our body good who have gone downtown to New Bedford two Sunday afternoons/month to “hang” with Doug and Linda Jones, true Servant-heart types making meals and serving them down at the Salvation Army. **3** You pray that God will give you a heart for serving, relying on Scriptural promises like,

Matthew 20:26 *It is not this way among you, but WHOEVER WISHES TO BECOME GREAT AMONG YOU shall be your servant* which is to say that Jesus said that greatness comes by becoming servant-minded.

Luke 14:13,14 *But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; FOR YOU WILL BE REPAID AT THE RESURRECTION OF THE RIGHTEOUS.*

Great meaning comes by feeling needed. And by being used of the Lord for His kingdom. The possibilities are limited only by our willingness to be stretched and utilized by Him. To the extent that we are really *open* to His leading and opening of doors, He is pleased (amazingly by His grace), to use us—we get a great sense of fulfillment in return!

Growth



**Moment
You Were
Saved**

**Moment
You Die**

HEBREWS 12: 14

Pursue peace with all men, and the **sanctification** without which no one will see the Lord. 15

See to it

that **no one comes short of the grace of God;**
that **no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble,**
and by it many be defiled;

16 that **there be no immoral or godless person**

like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal.

17 For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

18 **For you have not come to a mountain that may be touched** and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, 19 and to the blast of a

trumpet and the sound of words which *sound was such that* those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them. 20 For they could not bear the command, "IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES

THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED." 21 And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, "I AM FULL OF FEAR and trembling."

22 **But you have come**

to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,

23 to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and

to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and

24 to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood,

which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel.

Conflict

Immolation

Corruption

Immorality

Mis-conception

Our true arrival

Neutralizing Meaning “Blockers”
[from Hebrews 12]

Pursue

See-To-Its (three)

Not come/Have come

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Finding Meaning in Your Christian Walk (Lesson 6)

Scripture:

Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Date: June 17th 2001

The Meaning of Fatherhood (So Far...)

Introduction Here's what I know about fatherhood in a nutshell. I am one, of two daughters, 18 and 16. I had one father myself, 38 years older than me, who died when I was 41. (He only rarely spoke of his father, my Dad being the youngest of ten children. My grandfather died 11 years before I was born.) My Mom's Dad however was often spoken of by her (middle of 9 kids) and I knew him pretty well. Add to that my father-in-law who I knew for eleven years and who died when I was 32. Finally I can factor in my observance of other fathers, some close at hand and some from a distance. In that you have all that I personally know about fathering.

In another nutshell, here's what the Bible says about fatherhood: be a faithful Dad and stay with your kids and talk a lot about God, His Word and how the faith injects meaning into your life, do not tick them off by being too hard, by being arbitrary or worse by being abusive, and perhaps most powerfully love their Mom as Christ loved the church and then the kid gets a pretty good Dad too.

By the way I think it is interesting that we know relatively little about some of the most important founders of Christianity: absolutely nothing of Peter's father, about Paul's father, Mary Magdalene's, either Joseph or Mary's Dads, or most of the other apostles. (About James' and John's Dad we are given two details: his name, Zebedee, and his occupation, fisherman). About Jesus' Dad, Joseph, we know very little and we have nothing recorded, at least that Jesus said ~~nothing~~ about him. And yet the Bible does talk to some extent **about** and **to** fathers, especially believing fathers, men of faith. Consequently we take it by deduction that in the eyes of Him who spoke the universe into being, who created fatherhood as an important "subroutine" within the prototype man Adam and who Himself calls Himself God the Father, that human fatherhood is meaningful, significant and purpose-filled. Done right, it is a major preoccupation for a young man; enough to pour his life into and draw much satisfaction and meaning especially as he tries to convince his kid that there is a God, that He is knowable, that His Son died for us and that He wants to indwell and bless us as HIS children...

With little in the way of straight-forward success stories of fathering in the New Testament we scan the Old Testament. There we have Dads and sons like Adam and Cain and Able, Abraham and Isaac, Saul and his eight kids, David and his family, and a few others. None are what you might say, "Hey, I want to be just like them" at least not in

every respect—(another reason why I love the Bible in that it doesn't white-wash reality. It tells us what happened!)

1 Chronicles 10 ¹Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. ²And the Philistines followed hard after Saul, and after his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchishua, the sons of Saul. ³And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him, and he was wounded of the archers. ⁴Then said Saul to his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. So Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. ⁵And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise on the sword, and died. ⁶So Saul died, and his three sons, and all his house died together. ⁷And when all the men of Israel that *were* in the valley saw that they fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, then they forsook their cities, and fled: and the Philistines came and dwelt in them. ⁸And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his sons fallen in mount Gilboa. ⁹And when they had stripped him, they took his head, and his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to carry tidings unto their idols, and to the people. ¹⁰And they put his armour in the house of their gods, and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon. ¹¹And when all Jabeshgilead heard all that the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹²They arose, all the valiant men, and took away the body of Saul, and the bodies of his sons, and brought them to Jabesh, and buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh, and fasted seven days. ¹³***So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; ¹⁴And enquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse.***

And so I want to consider today one father in Scripture whose end is tragic. It is King Saul who was Israel's first-ever king. He had four sons by one woman, two by another (a concubine) and two daughters. His end is a sad end to a tragic life. He watches three of his sons die in battle, and then commits suicide. We read in 1st Chronicles 10 what happened and we read in 1st Samuel 31:10 ***And they put his armour in the house of Ashteroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan.*** I have been to both Mount Gilboa and to the ruins of Bethshan. Standing there at the foot of a high mound (a tel) and realizing that three thousand years ago this man's body hung on the city wall, headless--because we read that the Philistines chopped off the head and stuck it up in their god's temple... Soon some brave men, friends, countrymen or sympathizers stealthily (I think) took the four bodies and buried them. It is a sad tale. The anonymous chronicler tells us why God let this tragedy take its course: vs. 13 and 14. Saul committed the transgression of disregarding the word of the Lord and of getting into spiritism, or "divination" as it is called. In vs. 14 we read something that I would not think is too popular today: the Lord ***slew him***. Saul forfeited his life for the momentary pleasure of seeking a ghost. Amazing, isn't it? There were other sins of which he was guilty: disobedience with Agag; hatred against David; a willingness to murder David, and so forth.

I think there were probably lots of ways that this most sad and unusual person in the Old Testament affected his children. His life starts out well enough but suspicion, fear and then finally anger set in and come to captivate the man. If we Dads let anger and revenge come to be the main drives in our lives our children will suffer. We must check our

motivations in prayer and courageously open ourselves up to the probing Spirit of the Lord.

I can only believe so far, that the greatest significance I have as a father is to infect my own children with a willingness to seek the Lord, to follow and obey Him at all costs. The word of the Lord is plain enough in many areas, clearly revealed and laid down in the Bible. I don't even need too many mystical additional revelations—His word is already spoken and I have the faith to believe it is relevant to me! I need to pass that on to my kids. That is The Mission of fathering.

It's a tricky job.

Saul no doubt *told* his eight kids at various times that there IS a god. I doubt if any of them were atheists.

Saul no doubt *took* his kids to "church" or tabernacle at least...

I'm sure his kids *knew* who Samuel the prophet was (they had some Bible knowledge!)

I am sure his kids *heard him pray* some prayers from time to time.

Now so far as we know only Jonathan and maybe daughter Michal were people of real faith. We know that Michal *loved David* and since David so plainly loved the Lord maybe we can read some faith into her life. Jonathan also loved his friend David deeply and there too perhaps with higher certainty we can imagine him to be a man who loved the Lord. I wish I could tell you that somehow Jonathan escaped death by tragedy but he did not. He and three brothers died in battle. And then their Dad's life came to an end. The consequences of Saul's life affected others. Scholars say that the Philistines were opportunists and that Saul's preoccupation with capturing David cost him military effectiveness and even a strong economy such that Philistine invasion perhaps maybe could have been staved off.

What is your life really about, men? At the bottom line what drives you? What's your primary software? If we are serious in seeking the Lord and that is what drives us our kids cannot but benefit. Their lives may not be stress free or trouble free. But if despite all my weaknesses I am a man of God, my kids will be blessed. This, I believe, is the primary message for a Christian about fathering. It isn't "make sure your kid has all the money they need." It isn't "make sure your kid gets to do whatever they want." It is "Does your kid have a Dad who walks with God, who seeks the Lord even in difficult times, who is open to the work of the Spirit of the Lord and who wants that even when no one is looking?"

So far—from what I understand about fathering to this point—the meaning of fatherhood is to set up kid to have a happy, vibrant walk of faith with the Heavenly Father. For He is our savior and in Christ we can call Him Abba Father.

Dartmouth Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Finding Meaning in Your Christian Walk (Lesson 7)
Scripture: Titus 1:15-17
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: June 30th 2001

Entertainment, Meaning & Joy in the Christian Life

Introduction We are considering the subject of how to find or craft a sense of meaning in your walk of faith as a Christian. Ceremonies that we engage together are supposed to help in that—the Lord’s table, believers’ baptism, worship on the Lord’s day, Christian weddings, dedications and even funerals. But most of us cannot survive with any real sense of meaning on just going from one ceremony to another. We need fuel for meaning from a daily devotional experience and from serving consistently and often and from using our spiritual gifts. And now I come to a strange subject maybe in the search for meaning because I want to explore how “entertainment” affects my sense of Christian meaning. I want to do this because I think we need to admit that entertainment is a real big thing in our culture. We probably spend more time and money and energy—if we added it up—on one aspect or another of being entertained than on anything else other than working and sleeping.

Now, I know that this message could get me into a little trouble because I have to admit right up front that I am immensely entertained by things like *Star Trek Voyager*, Redskins and Virginia Tech (Hokie) football, Texas Rangers baseball, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, performances of the New Bedford and Dartmouth High School marching bands, Free Cell, “Shrek”, *the Lord of the Rings* classic trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien, Gettysburg, and hanging out with groups of college kids...these are a “few of my favorite things! But what does that mean?

The primary definition of to “entertain” is to **agreeably hold someone’s attention**. By that simple definition I think I’m interested in lots of things and there are lots of things that entertain me. So how do I evaluate this part of my life? And in my inquiry into what is truly meaningful in the Christian life I need to look at this area in the light of God’s Word. A disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ needs to be willing to try to surrender every area of his or her life to the scrutiny of the Word. No area of life is out of bounds or exempt from scrutiny and I want this area to please the Lord too!

Now here is a part of our reading this morning from the Book of Titus, chapter 1...
15 To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. 16 They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed.

Now which category do I want to fall into, the *pure* or the *defiled and unbelieving*? I think I might feel like my walk of faith is pretty meaningful and significant if I can feel some *purity* flowing through my life once in a while. I think I might sense the joy of the Lord if I can live a day or two in the PURE group. Not the self-righteous group...but the PURE group. Conversely I think I might wonder if there's any point to walking invisibly with God (since I can't see Him yet) if my life has defilement seeping out of it. I think I might think, "Hey, this Christian life is imaginary," if I toy with unbelieving and cynical stuff...

So what's that got to do with entertainment? Some think that entertainment really has nothing whatsoever to do with the spiritual life and Christians are waaaaay too uptight about entertainment "choices." Have you ever wondered what kind of entertainment "choices" there were in the ancient world of Greece or Rome? Well they basically had theatre in most cities. They also had sports, most notably gladiatorial contests—very grizzly and deadly. And they had a wide array of things of the erotic. Beyond that there were board games, health spas and gambling (which we see even at the foot of the cross of Calvary!) The ancient average citizen was really no less exposed to entertainment "choices" than we are! He just had no electricity at his disposal.

I think my basic operating philosophy on entertainment has been that I can't become corrupted by what is outside but by what is inside of me. Movies, plays, videos, songs, games, etc. are not the thing which can damage my walk with God. It is what is within ME that can damage my walk with God. Therefore if something on the outside—even IF it is entertaining—*triggers* what I struggle with on the inside, I should refrain from it. If it does not trigger on the inside of me what is weak or still carnal then I am at liberty to enjoy many things.

This requires some qualification. I am not always in command of what is weak or carnal in the inside. I may not even be fully mature to discern it all the time. We also are living in a time when all around us there is a "pull" to dumb down our standards. Even Christians sometimes say "Oh, that lust is not really a big deal."

So caution is always wise. Caution. There's a thing which seems to be disappearing today, like modesty. We seem to increase our insurance premiums so we can drive faster. We seem to add *more* safety devices and filters SO I CAN traffic freely in the danger zones. But the Bible places a premium on Christian caution. The Scripture tells us to (Ephesians 5:15) *be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise.* 2 Timothy 2:22 *Now flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*

I know, I know. If I engage carefulness and if I flee lusty stuff I won't have any fun. I won't be adequately entertained. I hear you!

But you know it should be no mystery when we indulge dangerous entertainment and walk close to youthful lusty stuff instead of fleeing it, that our Christian walk becomes

thin, empty, almost...meaningless. Drawing entertainment from things that are worldly or carnal saps the strength out of your spiritual walk with the Lord.

As I say, I like to be entertained. I love a good ball game. I enjoy an interesting film. Two years ago I was able to attend a big-time play in Boston (*Titanic*) and do you know that at the end of the movie the whole stage tilted up to 45 degrees and the cast fell down the side! I was fairly awestruck! But we need to keep entertainment in perspective. Americans seem to act as though it is one of our constitutionally guaranteed inalienable rights. It is not; it is a luxury, not a right.

CAUTION. Carefulness is a biblical thing; it is a Christian thing.

A second strategy to keep a high sense of meaning in our lives is to **BALANCE ENTERTAINMENT** with other things which are equally or more important. There **ARE** other things which are more important. Jesus did a lot of talking about what He called "the kingdom." As Christians we are "subjects" of an invisible realm. As subjects of a realm we must be obedient to the king. And the ways of the king and what He says is right and proper do not jive with what other kingdoms dictate. We must try to subject ourselves to **OUR King**.

Jesus said that no man can serve two masters. Well, if He is my Master then I must be willing to subject my decision-making to Him. If I choose some form of entertainment over His wishes, am I serving Him? Romans 12:1,2 says *Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*

I need to balance my need to be distracted and my need to have my attention held with my need to serve my Master. We do not have entertainment as the most important thing in our lives. And so balancing entertainment with discipleship means placing discipleship on top. Some practicalities:

1. Going out on Saturday night, if it impedes your desire or even ability to worship on Sunday morning is a choice.
2. Saying "No" to a small group because you have a favorite television show at a certain time is a choice.
3. Spending money on entertainment and then saying "I don't have anything to give to missions or to the Lord's work" is a choice.

Conversely, making a decision up front that the "kingdom" gets first pick of my time, money and energy and attention brings balance.

A third strategy is to **DEVELOP A CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO ENTERTAINMENT**. Many of you are doing this now. Some of our people have gotten a little vision for a new

coffee house. That blends edification with entertainment. They want to do this on a Saturday night when entertainment in our culture is natural.

We discern the things which drag us down and work to stay away from them and we engage the things which are fun and interesting and edifying and we feature *them* in our lives.

I believe God intends us to be NOT bored. I think Adam was probably fascinated with his world as God gave it to him. I think He is honored when we derive joy and occupation still with His creation. I think we find meaning in our walk of faith when we enjoy godly entertainment and I think we PRESERVE the great power of meaning in our faith when we shun the distractions of the world. Consider the words of the apostle John as we close: 1 John 2:15-17

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church
Series: Finding Meaning in Your Christian Walk (Lesson 8)
Scripture: 1st Chronicles 29:10-22
Speaker: Rev. Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Date: July 8th 2001

Finding Meaning in Spiritual Victories

Introduction Have you had any spiritual “wins” lately? I hope that you have. I hope you have some things happen to you where you feel like you did whatever the Lord wanted you to do and that consequently you felt His peace and joy. A “win” is any event, large or small, where you were confronted with the chance to either move forward and do the right thing, the thing the Lord wanted you to do, and you did it! In the Bible there are lots and lots of examples of spiritual “wins,” both big ones and little ones. In fact you could almost *look* at the Bible as a running history of “wins/losses” of a bunch of pretty famous (and some not-so-famous) God-followers. Like say, the **Big Ten!** Who are the “Big Ten?” Well, how about Jesus as #1 (and he went undefeated, of course, and really it hardly seems appropriate to put him in a list with other people, except that He WAS a man).

#2 is a tie between Moses and Paul.

#3 *has* to be Abraham.

#4 is... “Duh,” Peter, don’t you think?

#5 I think is a three-way tie between David, Mary and John.

#6 is Solomon

#7 is Eve (Adam didn’t make the Top Ten but he *did* make the Top Twenty).

#8 is Elijah

#9 would be James and

#10 would have to be... AndrewPhilipThomasBartholomewMatthew James(*son of*

Alphaeus)Simon the ZealotJudas(*son of James*)Matthias since they’re like, the rest of the apostles and they wouldn’t STAND for not being in the Top Ten, right?

I’m being humorous of course, because in Christ we have already won the Super Bowl! That is the wonderful thing about the Christian faith in the pure Bible is that we don’t have to wonder if we’re going to make it. Because we have such a HIGH VIEW of what Jesus did and accomplished. He has done it all and there is nothing left to accomplish that He has not already completed. Yes it is true, we need to manifest some serious good works—Our work is to spread the news about Christ, help folks to learn about the Lord and what is His will, and to edify and build each other up. That is a process. But along the way there are some battles.

Israel’s history is fascinating. Starting with the very *concept* of what Israel is (which drives Muslims nuts today, and some others too): a chosen people for God’s own possession! But even though God decided with Abraham as the first that He would have a single people, their history is full of difficulty. Abraham is there getting the people-of-God

idea off the ground and he has some real down experiences along the way: Lot, passing Sarah off as his sister, things like that. But he also has a real big victory in a momentary act of colossal faith when God asked him to offer his only son in sacrifice. It was a tremendous moment in his life; and while the Lord proved His faithfulness, Abraham has a moment of real victory: "Does God know what He's doing?" "Can God take care of me?" "Am I willing to trust God with this one?" Yes, yes and yes. One in the win column. A BIG win. So big it makes it into the New Testament...

Romans 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Galatians 3:6 Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

Hebrews 11:8-10 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

James 2:23 and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God.

Like many of the people in the Bible we would love to interview them and ask, "Hey Abe, how did you feel when the Lord came through?" "Did you feel all alive with faith in the five or ten minutes after?" "Did you and Isaac talk about the Lord as slew and sacrificed the ram that God provided?"

Moses is, of course, an interesting guy. "Background" on his resumé reads "Raised in Egypt, Bachelor of Science degree from UEgyptMemphis in architectural engineering; graduate work at Mt. Sinai School of Law; published works include books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Work Experience includes managing brokerage of ten plagues on Egypt, organizing major relocation of the Chosen People, successful orientation for Egyptian mobile command of underwater weapon systems, etc.

He was a real guy and had some struggles, notably striking the rock when God told him to just speak to the rock—it was disobedience and it cost him his personal entry into the promised land. But he also had some great "wins." Moses is all over the Old Testament but he also makes it into the New Testament:

Hebrews 11:24-29 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as though *they were passing* through dry land; and the Egyptians, when they attempted it, were drowned.

Once again, wouldn't it be fascinating if we could interview Moses? (Jesus of course had that opportunity at His transfiguration see [Matthew 17](#)). I would ask him, "Hey Mo, how did you feel as you led the people out of Egypt? Or when you clambered up the bank on the far side of the Red Sea?" Did you feel like the Lord is real? Did you feel like He loves you, like He was interested in your life?"

And then today we get to this passage that we have read in 1st Chronicles near the end of the life of King David. David is no less a compelling person to study than Abraham or Moses. He is Israel's second king and the one through whom it was predicted Messiah would come. Again the New Testament sums David up this way:

Acts 13:22 "After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID the son of Jesse, A MAN AFTER MY HEART, who will do all My will.' (See also 1st Samuel 13:14).

David had some real down points, some "losses." He completely blows it at the moment of temptation when he sees Bathsheba for the first time. He struggles with his children. He is not a perfect man. But all in all he was a man of God with some real powerful "wins." The lion, the giant, the relocation to Jerusalem and many other victories, SPIRITUAL victories punctuated his life and his walk with God. When that smooth stone sunk into Goliath's forehead, did God seem close to David? Don't you wish you could ask him how he felt at that moment? And the passage in 1st Chronicles 29 where they're gearing up to build the Temple in Jerusalem gives us how he felt! In fact it's interesting with David because he's a guy who we don't have to imagine an interview. He wrote down at the time how he felt about the Lord. It's called about half the Book of Psalms. And in 1st Chronicles 29:3-5 we can read also things like this: 260 tons

110 tons "Moreover, in my delight in the house of my God, the treasure I have of gold and silver, I give to the house of my God, over and above all that I have already provided for the holy temple, *namely*, 3,000 talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and 7,000 talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the buildings; of gold for the *things of gold* and of silver for the *things of silver*, that is, for all the work done by the craftsmen. Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the LORD?"

David's enthusiasm spread to the people:

9 Then the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly, for they made their offering to the LORD with a whole heart, and King David also rejoiced greatly.

And if you read on you see that David is really full of excitement and praise. Maybe, just maybe even as an old man he was as close to the Lord as he had ever been.

Now my point is that spiritual "victories" have a way of filling up our sense of meaning in the Christian life. When we feel like our faith is bearing some fruit and making some kind of difference, we feel like there is powerful meaning.

If we are affecting other people for Christ in some way, we having some "wins."

If we are ministering faithfully to each other and it is meaningful ministry, we are having some "wins." It feels good!

If we are taking a stand for what is right—and after all is said and done we can say, "this was just RIGHT, that's all. I took a stand." Standing up and being counted in some way makes us feel like there's great meaning in our faith.

If we're growing in understanding, which means somehow you're in the Word on a daily basis, you're going to be having some victories, even if it's just a victory over laziness or doubt. You're going to be able to look at the win/loss record and say "Hey, I've GOT some victories by God's goodness and grace and faithfulness and with His help (like David did

in verse 12 Both riches and honor *come* from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone.)

I think the Lord wants us to rejoice and feel joy in the victories you have. Sometimes I think we're just a little too quick to discount a victory. "Oh well, that wasn't me, you know..." Well it's good to be humble and not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. But it's also good and fun and significance-generating when we realize and catalog and praise God for the victories!

What spiritual victories have you had lately?

Have you entrusted the Lord with some issue of your life, and it was hard but you gave it to Him, and then you saw that He came through?

Have you shared the good news of Jesus Christ with someone and "Hey, they actually listened to me!"

Have you managed to say "No" to temptation a time or two lately?

Have you had a change of thinking about something that one day you were thinking carnally and then the Spirit talked to you and said, "Go this way instead," and so you actually decided, "Yes, I see. I'll go that way now."

Did you give something to the ministry to help build it up, and you got some joy for it?

I hope you have some "wins" this week. Nothing boosts our sense of meaning in the faith like a win-streak. They don't have to all be World Series, big time, earth shattering blow-outs. They can be a streak of little successes. The Lord loves to help us, my friends. The Scripture makes it so plain that Jesus knows just what we're struggling with. He is a completely sympathetic "high priest." And He will use His Spirit in your life to give you as many spiritual "wins" as you need to see!